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ABSTRACT

A process for evaluating the effectiveness of educational organizations, with a focus on accountability, is described. An evaluation of 15 pilot-test school districts in the Arizona Career Ladder Project reveals the existence of a major discrepancy between meeting program requirements and achieving program success. A theoretical model of organizational focus and support factors is presented. Eight steps illustrate the cyclical nature of the assessment process, which emphasizes assessment of organizational readiness and operational capabilities. Appendices contain sample profiles of focus and support factors; two figures in the text illustrate the process model. (3 references) (LMI)

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A PROCESS ASSESSMENT MODEL FOR EVALUATION, IMPROVEMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY IN EFFECTIVELY MEETING ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE & GOALS

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EA 022 323

A Process Assessment Model for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability in Effectively Meeting Organizational Purpose and Goals

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe a process for evaluating the effectiveness of educational organizations. Related to this objective is the need to demonstrate accountability for overall goals such as student achievement.

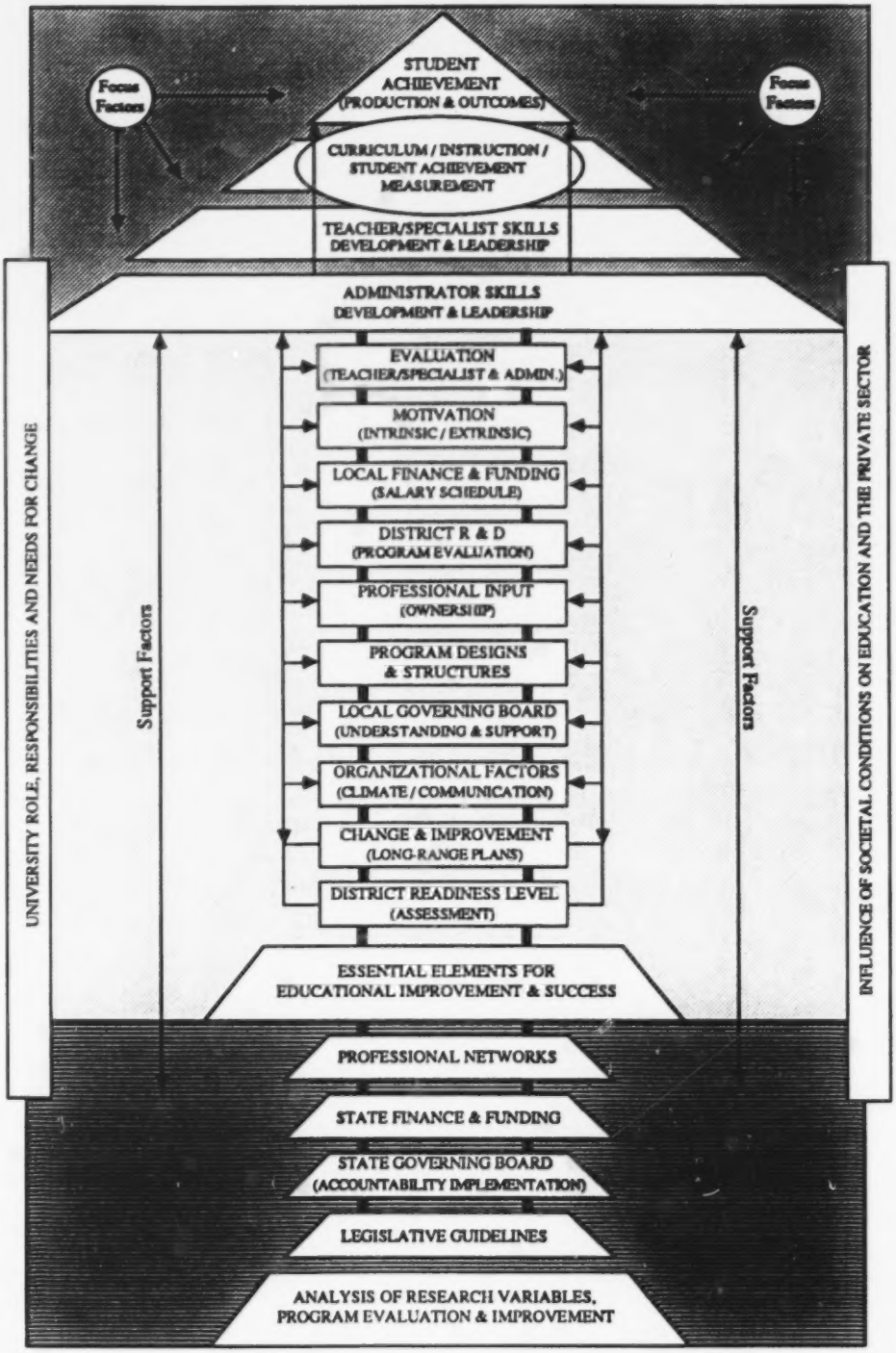
Research and evaluation of 15 pilot-test school districts in the Arizona Career Ladder Project (1985-1990) revealed a major barrier to successful participation. The researchers discovered a startling discrepancy with respect to these districts' ability to experience success with the program. This occurred despite the fact that all of these districts had met minimum legislated program requirements for participation.

In attempting to account for this diversity, the researchers developed a comprehensive theoretical model of organizational factors which are essential to effective operations and readiness to demonstrate accountability for results (Packard and Dereshiwsky, 1990). They consist of two types: broadly based *focus factors*, such as teacher development and student achievement; and *support factors*, such as organizational climate, teacher and administrator evaluation processes, and professional input and ownership. The support factors must be carefully aligned and integrated with respect to the overall objectives as depicted in the focus factors. Otherwise, maximal organizational effectiveness, readiness for positive change, and accountability for these results cannot be attained. This model is graphically depicted in Figure 1, page 2.

Each key organizational component must therefore be identified and assessed with respect to its current "level of operational health." This paper will present a process model which can be used to achieve such ongoing assessment. This model is illustrated in Figure 2, page 3.

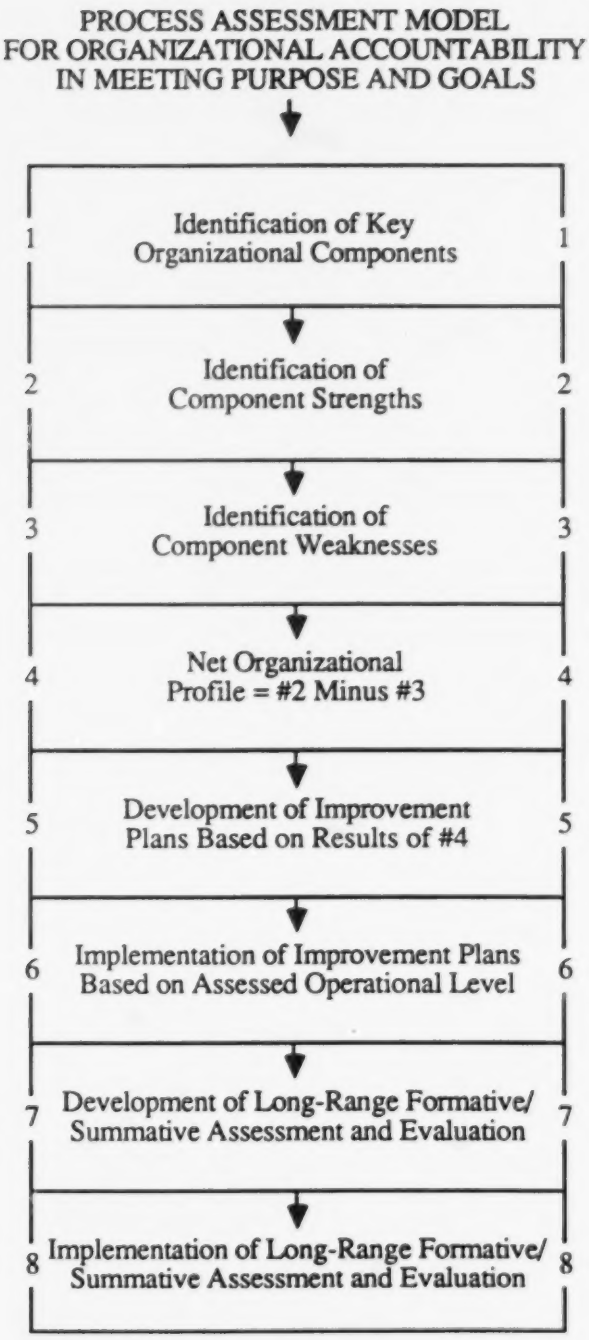
Figure 1.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS
ASSESSMENT MODEL


Focus Factors
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT (PRODUCTION & OUTCOMES)
Focus Factors
CURRICULUM / INSTRUCTION / STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT MEASUREMENT
TEACHER/SPECIALIST SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & LEADERSHIP
ADMINISTRATOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & LEADERSHIP
UNIVERSITY ROLE, RESPONSIBILITIES AND NEEDS FOR CHANGE
Support Factors
EVALUATION (TEACHER/SPECIALIST & ADMIN.)
MOTIVATION (INTRINSIC / EXTRINSIC)
LOCAL FINANCE & FUNDING (SALARY SCHEDULE)
DISTRICT R & D (PROGRAM EVALUATION)
PROFESSIONAL INPUT (OWNERSHIP)
PROGRAM DESIGNS & STRUCTURES
LOCAL GOVERNING BOARD (UNDERSTANDING & SUPPORT)
ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS (CLIMATE / COMMUNICATION)
CHANGE & IMPROVEMENT (LONG-RANGE PLANS)
DISTRICT READINESS LEVEL (ASSESSMENT)
Support Factors
INFLUENCE OF SOCIETAL CONDITIONS ON EDUCATION AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT & SUCCESS
PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS
STATE FINANCE & FUNDING
STATE GOVERNING BOARD (ACCOUNTABILITY IMPLEMENTATION)
LEGISLATIVE GUIDELINES
ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH VARIABLES, PROGRAM EVALUATION & IMPROVEMENT

A Model of Interrelated Components of Program Support and Focus Factors for Effecting Change and Reform in Education

Figure 2.


PROCESS ASSESSMENT MODEL
FOR ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY
IN MEETING PURPOSE AND GOALS
1
Identification of Key
Organizational Components
1
2
Identification of
Component Strengths
2
3
Identification of
Component Weaknesses
3
4
Net Organizational
Profile = #2 Minus #3
4
5
Development of Improvement
Plans Based on Results of #4
5
6
Implementation of Improvement Plans
Based on Assessed Operational Level
6
7
Development of Long-Range Formative/
Summative Assessment and Evaluation
7
8
Implementation of Long-Range Formative/
Summative Assessment and Evaluation
8
(Return to #1 and Repeat Cycle)

The remainder of this paper is abstracted from another document dealing with holistic system evaluation processes (Packard and Dereshiwsky, 1990). The following section identifies the necessary prerequisites for organizational effectiveness. Next, a model for assessing and identifying needed improvements for such effectiveness and accountability is presented, and key steps of the assessment process are identified.

Conditions for Organiztional Effectiveness. Packard and Dereshiwsky (1990, January) have identified several conditions which determine the level of effectiveness within and among districts. In order to become effective organizations with maximal impact on positive teacher development and student achievement, districts must recognize the necessity of developing total school system readiness. They are extremely unequal (*between* school systems) in their organizational capabilities and resources to impact student learning potentials. The researchers also found that organizational components (*within* school systems) exhibit varying capabilities and levels of resources to impact school goals. One inappropriately functioning component or negative factor can anchor and drag the others down or keep them from attaining the overall institutional goals.

The Issue of Accountability: A Proposed Assessment Process. Most school systems lack the necessary strategic planning, technological development and environmental readiness for effectively evaluating individual, program and organizational levels of operation throughout a long-range period. Similarly, they are insufficiently prepared to track the results of efforts at improvement. Accountability for effective school operations can only be achieved through implementation of valid procedures for assessing, profiling and improving the total organization and its components. The following general steps are necessary prerequisites for an organizational entity to demonstrate complete accountability:

1. Objective and valid evaluation of the total school system, in particular the alignment of its curriculum with specific learning objectives, as an integral part of the planning phase for major change and restructuring

2. Identification of interrelationships of those key organizational components which can critically impact overall organizational goals

3. Ongoing assessment, profiling and integration of these key interrelated components, in order to maintain their proper alignment and focus on the overall organizational goals

4. Prompt initiation of corrective action for those elements currently showing weaknesses, through application of specific improvement procedures which meet local needs

Additional detail on the assessment and profiling procedure is provided in the following section. The objective and valid information obtained from this method is necessary in order for the organizational entity to achieve and maintain the necessary readiness level to implement complex and comprehensive reform programs successfully.

A Holistic Approach to Evaluative Assessment of Individuals, Programs, Organizational Functions and Performance

Past attempts at restructuring and reform in education have resulted in little actual progress. The customary procedure of evaluating and changing only one or two essential units within total systems, and assuming that this will be the answer to the problems of reaching organizational goals, has proven to be very wasteful. The five-year evaluation process developed by the researchers established a more holistic approach, which was not limited to assessing programs and organizational components in isolation, but instead recognized all of the interrelated elements which share responsibilities for affecting agency performance and goal attainment.

The first step in assessing performance at the individual, program or organizational level is to identify those specific elements which are to be evaluated, as well as their interrelationship in terms of overall goal-setting and attainment. It is often helpful to depict these key system components in diagrammatical form. Figure 1, page 2, shows the interrelated *focus* and *support* factors of organizational structural components.

The actual assessment process consists of a series of sequential steps, as follows (Figure 2, page 3):

1. Collection of in-depth information on each element through use of all appropriate research procedures (e.g., quantitative data and inferential statistical tests in the case of evaluating gains in student achievement; vs. application of such qualitative methods as interviews, observations and open-ended written survey responses to assess organizational climate and communication)

2. Identifying the current operating *strengths* of each critical system component

3. Identifying the current operating *weaknesses/insufficiencies/areas of needed improvement* of each critical system component

4. Summarizing these "net" strengths and weaknesses for each component in the form of a *profile* (Figures 3 & 4, in Appendix A, depict an actual example of organizational component evaluation and profiling)

5. Based on results of this profiling procedure, formulating and implementing a remedial plan of action to improve those individual components which are currently at insufficient readiness levels to support overall goals (such as teacher development and student learning)

6. Placement of the organization and its individual members at levels of performance expectation which most closely correspond to their own current readiness and developmental levels. In other words, there needs to be a closer match between targeted objectives and present capabilities to reach those objectives. Specific examples at the individual (student and teacher) and overall system (district-wide) levels of this matching are as follows:

   a) a student who is currently assessed as reading on the 3rd-grade level should be challenged with developing reading skills which progress from that particular level -- not the 8th-grade level

   b) a teacher who is found to need assistance in teaching multiplication adequately should be inserviced and re-evaluated prior to being assigned to teach mathematics

   c) a district which does not presently have in place a valid curriculum, objectives and evaluation system should devote its energies to these priorities before attempting to classify its teaching staff according to different levels of performance in a credible manner

7. Undertaking a long-range (e.g., a 3- to 5-year period) documentation and formative/summative evaluation of the developmental progress of each component which has been targeted for change and improvement

8. Finally, conducting corresponding periodic review and monitoring of those components currently functioning at "operationally healthy" levels, in order to ensure their continued optimal focus and support of overall organizational goals

Conclusion

The preceding steps illustrate the continuous, cyclical nature of the assessment process. Potential problem areas within isolated areas of the total system may be spotted

immediately, and targeted for change and improvement by use of the profiling procedure. Appropriate remedial action can then be initiated, in order to re-align the presently dysfunctional element(s) with the more satisfactorily operating areas of the system. In this manner, more realistic organizational and individual goals can be set for the short- and long-term which are most closely matched to current readiness and operational capabilities.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE PROFILES OF FOCUS AND SUPPORT FACTORS

Figure 3

DISTRICT READINESS PROFILE OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

FOCUS FACTORS

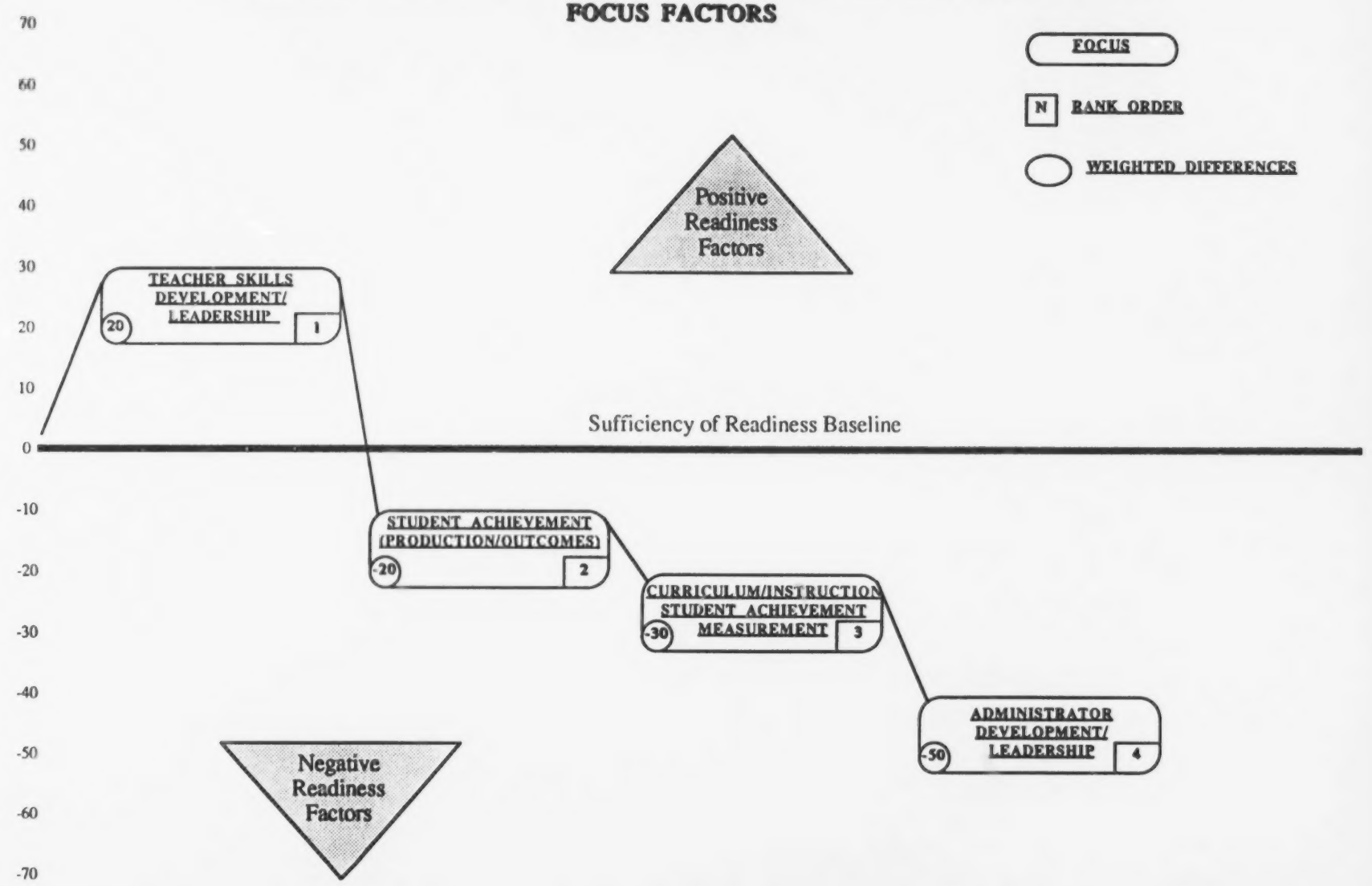
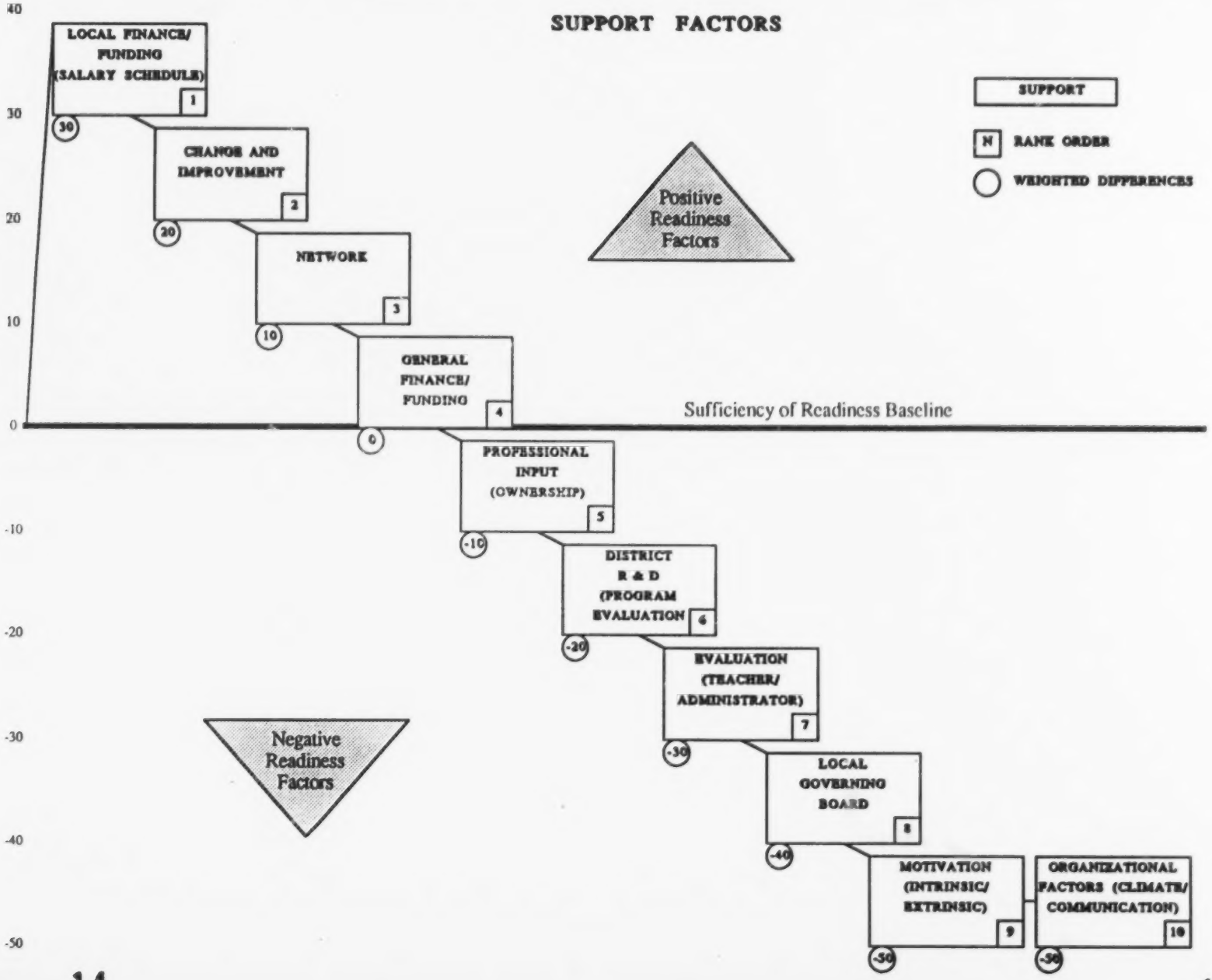


Figure 4

DISTRICT READINESS PROFILE OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES



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